

VZCZCXYZ0005  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNK #0001/01 0021124  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH (CCY AD159602 MSI6772-695)  
P 021124Z JAN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7981  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY 0205  
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0336  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0390  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 1932  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0724  
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0831  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0456

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000001

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY DELETING SECSTATE AS INFO ADDEE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2018  
TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [MR](#) [PREF](#)  
SUBJECT: WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS, JUNTA STYLE

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 683

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Since the August 6 military coup, little has filled the state-run media besides promises that the self-proclaimed Chief of State Ould Abdel Aziz will make life better for all Mauritians and public declarations of support for the junta. In an effort to sway public support, Mauritania's High State Council (HSC) has attempted to create the public image of coming to the assistance of the poor and down trodden. This image is based upon little premise and many unfulfilled promises. End summary.

Smoke and Mirrors  
-----

¶2. (SBU) In the face of international rejection, the junta is attempting to win popular support by portraying itself as coming to the aid of the neediest of Mauritians. For example, during a recent public meeting in Kiffa town, Assaba region, the self-declared president reportedly stated: "We (the junta) have not come for power, we came to defend the interests of the country." Their methodology to date has been to: (1) make promises and take no action; (2) conduct small-scale assistance projects with high-level media coverage; and (3) take credit for the actions of others.

¶3. (SBU) The military authority's most popular tactic to win public support is to make promises of a better life for its citizens. Days after usurping power, the junta sent a parliamentary delegation to visit returnee camps in the Rosso area. The event was highly publicized, and the junta made general declarations that assisting these returnees, who were largely victims of ethnic discrimination during the "Passif Humanitaire" crisis in 1989 through 1992, would be a top priority for the new leadership. However according to human rights activists, the situation in the returnee camps has not really changed except that now there are a few hundred new returnees, and in a recent symbolic gesture by the junta, two of the more than 5,000 returnees have recently received their national identity papers. Without papers, returnees cannot travel and have difficulties sending their children to Mauritanian schools (Reftel).

¶4. (SBU) The average Mauritanian will say the quality of life

in Mauritania has not significantly changed since August 6. Some credit the junta with the decrease in gasoline and cement prices, however they will also say that little progress has been made to provide greater economic possibilities, better healthcare and education as they would like.

15. (SBU) At the junta's December 25 cabinet meeting, it was decided to create two new Nouakchott-based hospitals: a Women's and Children's hospital and a Cardiology hospital. This announcement in government media included a blaring headline in French, "The Chief of State orders the government to ensure the lowering of health costs," when in effect, the article only mentions the anticipated creation of the two new hospitals and nothing about lowered costs for health service delivery.

16. (C) The public health sector in Mauritania is neither developed nor strong. 2008 was the planned start of increased decentralization of public health service delivery, with the creation of department-level hospitals instead of the existing regional hospitals. That decentralization, however, has been slow to start due to lack of resources. The National Hospital's facilities are antiquated and lacking in basic necessities. The national HIV and AIDS treatment center is reportedly struggling to obtain the medical supplies and medications it needs to continue to treat the nation's HIV positive population. It is unknown what donor support, if any, these new initiatives will receive. Israel, for example, is already launching a new oncology hospital, and Qatar is temporarily sponsoring the operations of a regional hospital in Boutelimit.  
Small-scale but well publicized assistance  
-----

17. (SBU) To date, the military administration has implemented numerous small-scale projects about which government media has publicized. Some of these initiatives have been more successful than others.

18. (C) On December 3, coup leader Abdel Aziz presided over a water pumping ceremony in Tintane village. The state run newspaper Horizon ran the story on its front page with the headline, "The Visit of Hope." In 2007, Tintane suffered significant flooding for which the Abdallahi Administration did little to alleviate. The junta's pumping of the Tintane water was symbolic for many, however an eye witness reported to USAID rep that the water pumping effort was not successful because the water was simply pumped from one location in Tintane to another, without addressing the larger infrastructure problem.

19. (SBU) The government newspaper reported on December 9 that thanks to General Abdel Aziz, the Assaba regional hospital received a dialysis machine and a CT scanner. The article did not include details relative to staff training for equipment operation and maintenance. The media subsequently discussed the fact that the dialysis machine was procured outside of normal channels through a company run by an Aziz relative and that the machine cost more than standard cost and was delivered with less capability than promised.

110. (SBU) The week of December 10, the junta reportedly distributed 14,000 tons of rice to families in the economically disadvantaged suburb area around Nouakchott. However, independent on-line news source Taqadoumy quickly reported that the rice was on the verge of expiration, only two weeks after its distribution. Also this month, the junta distributed seeds and farming implements to a handful of farmers in the Rosso area on December 11.

111. (SBU) On December 15, the junta announced that it will provide 35 of the more than 5,000 returnees from Senegal with a 15-day veterinary training and skills development.  
Comment: Although this is a positive step, it is a drop in the bucket of returnee skills training and resource needs.  
End comment.

¶12. (SBU) In a December 15 article titled, &The Great Manipulation8, independent newspaper L'Eveil reported that four days prior, the junta convened citizens from Kaedi department, Gorgol region, to attend a workshop on community development needs, however the event was instead a ceremony to endorse the junta leader and to publicly declare the department's pro-coup standing.

¶13. (SBU) On the Tabaski holiday, the junta's prime minister provided one "boubou," the traditional men's outfit, to each of the prisoners at Nouakchott's central prison.

You did what???

¶14. (C) In several instances, the military administration has been taking credit where credit is not necessarily due. For example, the December 16 issue of Horizon reported that a Mauritanian delegation to the United Nations, recent Climate Change conference in Poland successfully negotiated \$8 million USD for various climate change initiatives in Mauritania. However UNDP-Mauritania informed USAID rep that the article was incorrect, and that it was rather a new \$5 million USD UNDP-funded climate change project that was announced at the conference. This is a project that has been planned since 2006 and will be fully managed by UNDP, not the junta. The article also featured photographs of the Mauritanian delegate with UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and French Environment Minister Jean-Louis Borloo. According to World Bank-Mauritania staff persons who were following the event, these photographs are merely hallway shots meant to give credibility to the regime and a false perception of actual proceedings of the conference.

¶15. (SBU) On December 14, Horizons ran a front page story on the creation of a national fund for local development, "Fonds d'Assistance et d'Intervention pour le Developpement (FAID)."

According to the article, the FAID was conceived by the Junta chair Aziz following public meetings he attended in various locations around the country. The article does not mention if and how this initiative will be funded and that similar national development funds have existed in previous years under different names.

¶16. (C) Also this month, Government media reported that on December 17, the National Assembly voted to modify the 2009 national budget and allocated 884 million Ouguiyas (\$3.4 million USD) for a rural development vocational training program, two billion Ouguiyas (\$7.7 million USD) for the next presidential election, and one billion (\$3.8 million USD) for eradication of the vestiges of slaveQ According to Horizons newspaper, thesQhanges were possible due to a reduction in the government operations line items. Comment: It is difficult to understand how funds could be re-allocated in this manner. Actual government budget figures are not available, and IMF and World Bank representatives believe that what little budget information is available, is not accurate. End comment.

Only time will tell

¶17. (C) Comment: There continues to be a great need for humanitarian and development assistance in Mauritania, and it will grow. The European Union, Mauritania,s largest donor, will wait until February before making a determination on sanctions. Until then, it is business as usual for on-going projects, while new projects remain frozen. If the European Union and other donors apply sanctions, the junta will need to make a more concerted effort to provide evidence that it is doing more for the Mauritanian people than empty promises and symbolic micro-projects. Money will be tighter, and public interest will suffer. Donors have indicated that, even in cases where the political decision is made to continue or initiate programs, the lack of financial transparency in government accounts will create significant doubts. Whereas before the coup, some donors (notably the European Union) were prepared to expand budget support assistance based on significantly improved government

financial transparency, funding will now likely either be  
channeled through expensive international contractors or be  
subject to extensive accounting oversight. End comment.

HANKINS